



Table of Contents.

Don Cooper & Thorpe Feidt	1
John Crawford	13
Charles Olson	31
Ovid (Michael O'Brien, translator).	35
Jack Shoemaker.	43
Richard Snell	53
John Crawford	55
Charles Olson	59

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"Homer's world was locked tight in River Ocean . . ."

Western European space dominated man's sense of real--

till 1949--

Americans saw their own space as closed--excepting those who,
with the sea as source, opened that form so cultivated.

OPHRUOEIS

NOTES ON AN OPERA:

In this time of exploding, when all movement is fast/out,
when digging in is no longer an alternative, they ask composers
to stand still, rooted somewhere between the 15th and 19th
centuries, with that vision,
protector of status quo
quietly in academies
I say, this is art as death's twin, and I say to hell with it.

*" . . . That is, we are far too late any longer to
be limited by any inherited scheme. Instead we are
specifically after what is placed /or equally vitally
not placed except for the exception at root to this,
that, that which can't be placed has therefore to yield
to some other possibility. For example, future."*

*--Charles Olson,
Letter to TP, 2/24/68*

Theatre is unreal now to the degree that it falls behind events.
If its form is slow--for example, naturalistic repetition of 18th
or 19th century time--it drags itself under. The fact is that

dialogue does not exist. Plot does not exist. Character and/or "issues" do not exist. All those constructs are under re-examination. Issue is solely a verb. Things happen, there is no prior shape, they grow: that's the event drama now must work from, to be of any consequence at all.

. . . And the joke of course is, that "realism" is still penned in that boxed space the proscenium (an interior, say, painted flats, Renaissance illusionism), that "naturalism" in acting is also internalized, so that the actor's task is just to "be" a "real" person (lowest common denominator)--never to take on the elements, never to show us what gods and heroes do.

"And the material on which he the director works, the themes he brings to throbbing life are derived not from him but from the gods. They come, it seems, from elemental inter-connections of Nature which a double Spirit has fostered.

"What he sets in motion is the MANIFESTED.

"This is a sort of primary Physics, from which Spirit has never disengaged itself."

--Antonin Artaud.

"... Immediately you will sense that one is now 'free' to be or go any where--or specifically just where one can get. And thereby arises a wholly livelier universe. Or Creation: one then does have to be precise, & literally like a shaman start some powers at least of transformation I'm not particularly interested myself in the more magical and dramatic effects of translocation. I prefer in fact--and the Feinstein letter point is this 'other one,' of pure localizing.

"With that actually one can get on any of the 4 'sides'--and without it I'm pretty sure the World gets too adulterated to be positive any more. In fact the subjective and relative eats all up (doesn't it?) And the local--or collective actually consequential Nature of God Whitehead calls it, I'm pretty sure/ enlists or immediately lets in, or throws one out into, the primordial. Which is in fact the Spirit-body of all being."

--Olson, letter to TF, 2/24/68

II

from a Letter, 3/4/69:

"... I don't like a hung-on name
'mixed media'
'multi-media,' etc. (the new)
or 'opera,' with its historical connotations (those holdings)
but I can't think of what to call it except, by its name
(Ophruoeis) which at an earlier time began new approaches,
although, god knows, it isn't a straight line to these new
beginnings . . ."
--DFC.

Letter, 3/7/69:

"... and not a 'happening' either--
error of the timely--the thing has to be made, the
joints fit or they don't. Music, voice, dance, film--
they can't come off as mixed, it must be one thing.
(Even though they are separate--we can't muddy them
and have anything but mud result--the parts dovetail,
clean, coincide to make the piece.)"

--TF.

OVERTURE:

*(Cavern.
Tunnels.
Noise of the Dead.*

*Ophruoeis alone on black stage. Distant. Small
light picks him out, walking, slowly, forward:)*

In Tartaros
the winds are black

In Tartaros
my harp,
struck
charmed to stillness the wheel of Ixion

Howling Multitudes

In Tartaros
the Dogs
in sweetness licked my hands

In Tartaros
 Tantalos forgot his thirst
 Sisyphos sat at rest
 the Furies' faces wet with tears
 cried Justice
 and Hades with his Queen
 drew near to listen

In Tartaros
 I had my day

" . . . In other words that 'cosmology'
 is as instant as experience if one 'lived'
 in a condition of stance--and I think it is
 a consequence of stance that one experiences
 these 'lines' one old get one's hands on--
 that is, that, properly, I was right in the
 Hopi reference you originally quoted, in
 calling it 'localism': a conceiving of
 oneself as as active as Hercules /in
 Alcestis/ in catching her, at the last
 possible moment, of exit--Only he is of
 course there pure shaman."

--Olson,

Letter to TF, 3/12/68

I turn in eagerness
 look
 into darkness
 look
 into fading likeness of my love
 look
 in love in eagerness I turn
 see the fading image of love
 see the darkness grow
 too soon in human eagerness too soon

And now where, Ophruoeis where is your harp
 that cornered spring
 made her quicken,

your drum
 the flute Ophruoeis your harp
 that made her smile
 to your harp, sing
 your drum, dance
 flute
 follow in love

Now with icy grip the Snake coils the heart
 chokes
 the breath, short
 eyes
 dim

III

(He tries to get her back, by seance--the setting now 30th century, street clothes, etc. The music: taped voices, low in pitch, echoing in large space--live music percussive except for clarinet obligato.

("Make the events find their own connections, the wit, is in the connection. Don't let it come full circle keep it open moving out in chain action, 'projective,' don't let it first comment on action (H-wood sound track) yet don't separate it from the visual (stage), if separate no guarantee that the third thing created will work (chance--too chanay)" --DPC, 4/6/69

Seance. An other spirit answers:

Under earth I watched
 the years built on years, packed beneath rock

flesh clawed off
 the mouth, a cave filled with soot
 the place where they cast me
 bones broken within, on top
 of another's ashes

Beneath the throne
 the old lips move,
 flesh,
 love, as you say still holds old cares
 finds legs again

Shadows, familiar

stretch fingers, petals to sun, grass
 rises
 trees
 stand,
 black in the light
 in whiteness shines
 my land--
 to greet them, you, with a voice not your own,
 I, alive in your throat
 grow
 refresh
 the vine Dionysos

(. . . and moves the seance into something else:)

I ask only, to touch the objects of
 my love.

 feel warmth,
 have warmth returned,
 in that most human way

And, you so quiet under my hands
 ask that I play oracle to
 confusion,
 self-pity.

I live,

 warm
 live
 own sorrow,
 feel texture
 by Apollo

see

 the object of my love

head rolling

 blood
 hot to my hands
 double axe
 kings
 gone down
 in such short time

Give death

 birth
 this Spring bring
 forth dance, renew
 green, the black ash

O my lord,
 I am not magic,
 have not the advantage,
 nor some thing,
 to dredge up, old and
 buried terrors.

But with this flesh,
 thighbone, stick,
 drum
 cause thunder
 Cast image anew
 from burning
 land, green
 the new
 green

(The seance dissolves. Partitions that marked the interior setting roll back on their hinges; revealed "windows" on either side of the stage declare new sight: behind the actors, films begin.)

What happens,
not plot,
what happens
 not
 what does it mean:

Film shouldn't be framed in story any more than theatre. In fact the interest of the medium--that it moves, projects visible events in time--insists that plot, psychology, any "idea," be subordinate to the running-on second-to-second continuous act, to the accumulated build-up of acts. Plot, as inherited, encloses event (fine for boxed space.) But film, by the demands of its nature, can free it, reenact its strength./

Ophraosis steps forward, out of this century:

In this earliest spring
 the limbs still wet,
 blackened
 held still by that most recent cold
 the rainbow moves to spawn
 rotten logs play mother to pale cream slips

and
 despite this knowledge
 movement of the sun
 seasons well fixed in mind
 man
 fears
 the She Snake in fickleness will not renew
 the seasons

Behind him on film has been the movement into spring. Black roots, twigs, leafless, pass in close-up conjunctive shots across the two screens, in stark black and white. The pace slow, but no let-up of movement; the shape and direction of a shot on one screen carries over, or cuts against, the shot on the other. Rhythm of bare branches, cold sky, dark thicket.

Ophruosis walks back into the stage space. The seance table is now altar. The "sitters," masked, now are Khoros. He puts on the lion's pelt.

On film masked figures, very still, appear from underbrush, are discovered in the grain of a tree. The texture turns into a face. The light comes up. Buds. Foliage. The season arrives. The figures move through the forest, in masked processional. Simultaneously Ophruosis is shown, alone, without mask, bending back the branches in his path. High sun, deep shadow. The wind shakes light from the leaves. The music

develops slowly here--the roaring bull, conch shell, longer lines electronically produced. The attacks are hard, follow the visual action, the mood still black, get stronger with live percussion, no break till end it goes out, keeps pouring it on, a straight line with no relief until recap--ironic, slower; to finish softly.

On stage, danced processional. Khoros:

She taught us
 beginnings in vine, twisting leaf
 round the head of a girl
 in dance repeating
 old steps . . .

As the figures travel the pace on film picks up. Total movement, dance of forms, from screen to screen. Ophruosis is sighted. Pause. Masks in extreme close-up. Long pan down tree trunk that vines have strangled, coiled like a snake. Weapons drawn; axe, knife, spear. Stalk, then chase, very fast, the running forms picked out by only flashes of sunlight in the thick wood. Struggle. Ophruosis captured.

*Cut, abruptly, to pastoral mood--
nature in full summer, a grace.
Shots held longer on screens.
Quieter. Ophruosis is not killed,
he is brought back, on stage, as
triumph, crowned to Eury-Dike--the
"other spirit," not his love--who
waits for him:*

EURY-DIKE: Your sounds, caused air
where I floated, to sing,
arrows of lightning your words
delivered, again
the weight of my body, white scrapings of
purified bones, brought me home,
where I come to you.

OPHRUOIS: I am no adept.
Life moves in the ear
and none speak
its language.

EURY-DIKE: Talk only, touch, love,
let tender
signs know--the hand, that once
cut rock--press
my skin
held,
in his glance
held
as our flesh
under the march
of his caterpillar legs

OPHRUOIS: a life
to move
to his
bright step

EURY-DIKE: as hers
 across night
 drags waters,

 as we

BOTH: who join
 this instant,
 dance
 the fullness
 the marriage
 flutes celebrate
 splendor, returned,
 to the bursting
 ear, the
 open
 flowers
 leaping
 this moment
 the stalks
 of our bodies
 the brightness
 we found
 in our eyes

IV

As the love dust closes, a new mask, carried on a stick, travels through the woods. Black, its cut-out eye-holes alive with the day shown through them--striking through them--the mask moves toward the viewer, then turns, in double exposure, and passes over the face of Ophruois.

Images of tree, mask, leaf pile on each other in increasing attenuation. The music gathers energy, as the masked figures bunch together. Strain. One breaks it, swings his axe. Ophruois ducks, slips free, but the others pen him in, club him down, on a rock, a knife cuts him open, a spear, they chop till nothing is left, they go on chopping, Eury-Dike watching, serene.

Return to blackness, the twisted trunk. Knotted branches. Husk. The head is placed on the altar. One of the Khoros steps, very slowly, toward Eury-Dike, who stands motionless. Softly, they repeat the last part of the love dust, it continues as darkness covers them.

A pin of light stays, at the altar. The film space shrinks to a dewdrop, and all sound seems to come from the head.

--Don Cooper & Thorpe Feidt



CRAWFORD

OLSON

Letters

to George Oppen

"Some of the young men
Have become aware of the Indian,
Perhaps because the young men move across the continent
Without wealth, moving one could say
On the bare ground. There one finds the Indian

Otherwise not found. Wood here and there
To make a village, a fish trap in a river,
The land pretty much as it was."

--George Oppen, A Narrative, part 10.

One.

It seemed to me
 though you did not say
 that you felt that the young men
 traveling on land
 are, being
 close to the Indian, some
 comfort

(words, painful, to extrapolate).

I told the friendless Indian
 in the Pueblo Colorado
 restaurant: y e s,
 I knew of where he had come from.
 "I come from
 the Chama Valley
 and I drive the long night
 now
 I don't have returning my way
 but you know my way
 tell me my way."

Friend, I was a casual
 asker.
 I don't know where you wanted
 to go
 and I have almost forgotten the Chama
 Valley. I remembered
 green spruce, brown river.
 Specific, to occupy those places,

but with the names gone from my memory
 and their etymologies
 the places themselves are in suspension.

Friend, you cannot tell me
 and ought not
 enough about where you are going
 for direction.

* * *

We are no comfort. I know
 you never spoke of, using the word,
 comfort. Nor did
 the Indian. But involved
 in the terror of being like the sun,
 traveler, being,
 like the sun, in
 expectability of one's return,
 solace though it say not so.
 N o. I will not see it
 being seen.

We are no comfort. The Indian
 none else but his referent.
 No part of me. He had already and
 let him have his
 Corn Maiden
 Coors
 devils in pueblos
 endangering fertility
 of maidens.

We are twice no comfort. The poet
 is too inquisitive, of moving,
 of his language,
 to see that the Indians and young men
 must be w i t h o u t his language
 inanimate.

Inanimate. Make me explain. Not
 head eating tail. But the sum,
 what is necessary to the sun,
 terrible; specific,
 circular, essentially
 inanimate.

* * *

When the wheel spins the periphery
 grows hot and strikes off stones.
 The center
 trembles
 not moving. It is conceivable
 to be not j u s t one,
 other,
 but to be,
 together.

The Indian twice friendless
 in asking the others too many questions
 in asking me one question
 spun his pickup tires
 just so. Like a man that might have had a
 hard on
 riding horses
 after the Blue Deer. Like a Tigra
 of Taos.

But it's not deserved, don't put me in
 his place or name.

To talk, fictively
 as if they had a place beside their own:

George the Sioux the Shoshone the singers senders
 are gone
 and I am n o t one of them
 -- what k i n d of etymologies?

I don't know in my bones
 what to do when the sun
 rises. Not rootless,
 my own home,
 alone. Like the valleys
 stationary place
 which moves, brown river,
 with language
 only.

* * *

But George, you should have seen
 the sky, what was mounted on that sky,
 in Kansas. David drove all night
 under it and on the roads of detours
 hating it and not wanting to wake me,
 hating me and wanting always to drive under it.
 The day dominated equally. The god
 squats over the sky. We saw his haunches,
 t e r r o r, and emerged with jealous rage,
 with speculations. Endless blues, cadres,
 gouaches,
 no one had ever told me.

* * *

Relevance, however, is another
 matter. Words,

the coyote in Nevada
 who, having a good red coat
 could be the lord of that desert
 valley --
 I did not begin as a young man
 to travel
 to find any perspective. I began
 since my distances became my home,
 since only names enclosed apparent
 differences. Words,

The Mormon Revelation. "God will not
 allow the Negro into the Circle of
 the Sun, or into the Priesthood
 because he was not Valiant
 at least until, or unless
 there are new Revelations.
 And I challenge you,
 son,
 to find a more total Religion."

Coyote, my own name,
 that gamut I do not want to run.

* * *

But words.
 My whole home, George, as much as yours,
 the etymologies
 provide -- the responsibility
 of decency
 equally, entirely
 terrible. I want you to tell me
 one place where I mean an Indian
 and m e a n what I mean, all of that
 or any part of that.

David however,
 having as I am writing
 just driven into Sacramento,
 has seen a palm tree, and
 his first one.

Not that we are, or mean
 comfort. Do not think of this
 (I am a young man
 I am writing a letter to my father)
 as any journey which can accrue
 comfort to you simply
 because I may love you
 despite the distances. Because
 I'm inanimate, I want

suspension, I have seen high desert
 ospreys,
 but I want what I want to be
 -- specifically --
 as true as words and permeable.
 Someday I hope to be able

to write you a letter --.
 The push of the night sky
 and the hot day wind
 have taken me this far
 in a cart
 where wheels still at center strike stones
 at rims and even at center
 may
 tremble
 similarly. George, I made it
 in five days over the land from Maine
 to California
 and send greetings.

Two.

In chambers of the old estates
the Regime hallucinates,
The god squats over the sky
in Berkeley.

On my elevator door the mirror watches me
going. On the streets
the riots start. The motorcycles
hate. Daughters of merchants
bait the Negro to heave the stone
at windows of
those goliaths
and cops club Negroes down
with pleasure then. Trains are stopped
and cops club Negroes down
from engines. This will go on.
This is the terminus
for Viet Nam.

I am out of time and places
at dinners in the old estates
alone. Riots in the mind
begin with mirrors.
The mind inhabiting its own interiors
with cacophonies.
How shall I say what I have seen
in time to leave this testament

* * *

In his cart
 the Indian is all night under
 the wind of the desert.
 Ospreys in day
 herald the coming of the cart
 all hovering.
 Take the cart out into the high desert!

The poet, moving
 to the slow roll of frontier
 in a landscape
 with an Indian painted in
 had meant
 longevity
 what can find
 still in this bleeding nation
 its establishment.

Yet: in the same New Mexico
 the cart with flagellated Saviour
 saved for Easter celebration
 with the bloody doll, the bow and skeleton --
la carreta de la muerte. Carrying
 pestilence; crucifixion.
 That that cannot be countenanced
 b e g a n my etymologies.

* * *

The young lady having gone to England
 upon the death of her father in Vienna
 told of the stake
 that she had put through
 his fat black heart. "Daddy,
 I'm through."

My contemporaries
 born around 1940
 do not betray me. Part
 of a new American violence
 is the irony
 of the new passivity. The Nonviolent
 stop trains by running headlong into them
 at night screw bitterly
 whatever there is for screwing;
 make love not war.
 Make scenes,
 themselves are the new nightsticks
 though even good hard wood
 is broken by beatings.

While the estate
 has a cellarful of wine-casks bats and mirrors.
 Ladies still confide in chambers
 and if looters gather
 the class resorts at last to masochism.
 Hang the lady of the house from the low ceiling!

And are convinced so easily
 that they are due for flagellation
 and Berkely is only one of many waiting

* * *

"I want"; it started there.
 A young friend of the poet wrote
 this as his own
 six times each one in new calligraphy.

And I -- greedily --
 "What is necessary to the sun
 that cares for none but circling --

"If I must be
 if the discharge of the womb delivered me
 then let me be the sum --"

wanted to be
 "Inanimate in my own system
 with all that turns about me --"

A girl sings
 "My poetry is short
 its fire burns. A gypsy
 light on his toes,
 aerial,
 all beautiful to me.
 A dark man takes me from
 my mind one hour then
 I hate him, go back home.
 I am nineteen
 and have had
 fifty experiences
 two abortions
 pleasures of instant love and fast
 deception.
 Clean.
 I never shall live loving
 with a man."

They have been burning the houses.
 "Entire
 blocks of homes and stores
 were looted of valuables from clothing to refrigerators
 and color television sets
 then set to the torch while firemen
 helplessly tried to move
 their rigs
 through the cordons of jeering
 Negroes."

Where has this new Jerusalem come from?
 Not from those poor jigs.

* * *

The head that starts that journey
 wickedly.
 The estate shall eat itself.
 The young men,
 r e t u r n to the unreal, essential
 Indian or eat themselves
 also. And thus. Always.
 Take the cart out into the high desert!

Not that there is clear air there
 or a prospectus of the valley. Conditions
 repeat themselves. Dirt gets to you
 as the city soiled you, sun burns you,
 the rats you left in the New York and Berkeley
 houses
 find you. The water can be poison,
 there are mirages.

O daughter!

Not that it is elemental, metaphor.
 But that there your fathers
 do not bow down to you and show
 the backs of their necks to you,
 you are n o t their daughters and need not prostitute
 yourselves thinking to distress them
 suicidally

you can be perfectly violent
 killing the small animals for food meaning to
 and passive when the sun gone down has left
 you peeling
 into a second skin. You need not bother
 dig and plant a garden
 then for your ironies.

* * *

There: taking it

by the roadside
 soft turf where one can sleep at nighttime
 in the valleys. And the coyote

coughs words up at the dawn
 and I am rediscovered in my home.

* * *

After the looting of this nation
 words which remain
 after the last tormenting sufferer is put
 his head inside his guts
 words which remain
 are salt upon the ground for gathering
 to spice the seed and food of farther ground.

A girl hung dying from the ceiling of the old estate.
 A doll held a bow down, dripping blood from red, red hands.
 The conjunction of the two seemed a thing determined by the stars.
 We gave applause.

I have traveled far now, from my intended:

Dissolve the grounds.

Distribute their furniture! and lay them
 in graves all hovering
 and laugh at them laughing
 as you clap the shovel in and slip it
 past the mandible and in
 the cranium.

And singing as you tractor down the grounds

Go down society
Society
Don't bother me

and burn and salt their grounds.

Three.

But O, George,
what we do not need
of our old language. Or we need
that additionally
a kind of idiot's history.
For the moment however
there has been the burning to be done
then the journeying.

I see the houses and offices of America,
burning paper, broken presses,
girls happy at the National Guard's
advances. And y e s, there will be bones
in the cellars
of our father.

Not unreasonably: new followers
of old Voltaire.
"Sheep live together in society
very agreeably;
we consider them very
meek in character
because we do not see
the prodigious quantity
of animals that they devour."

Nonviolence does violence to violent languages.
Dialectics is amusing. Guns too that go boom
make children join in the public
laughter.

But to turn
as the sun turns from those valleys
and leaves the chaparall in backlight
illuminated new;

In the second letter with the sun high
I made a burning. Now,
with the sun a fringe around the russet shadow
of the neck of the intervening
osprey,
it is time to turn to angels
which if premonitory only
yet when we have made our safe return
surely will come.

* * *

The mind is necessary to the sun.
 "If I must be
 then let me be the sun
 terrible in fire
 gold flourisher
 circular
 inanimate in my own system
 with all that turns about me."

In Brittania
 the barons have decided
 against the Celtic calendar.

Patrick's polyglot
 making room for all the suns
 Arabic, Egyptian,
 and Saints tuned in to pagan
 occasions.

The Roman Party winning,
 "We are so true to changes
 we will not brook as changes
 that which changed before the Universal Church
 in catholicity
 made changes." And Bede deceived
 spent plenty on a Roman calendar.

But the mind encompasses more sums.
 And when koshares
 in the dances in
 the dances find
 a totem possible to seek the sun
 as witch hazel stick sought water
 they raise in the blue air
 of their Pueblo plazas
 that great wand.

Have you heard the slow roll of their drums
 thunder! the electric in the air
 and the seed laid on the air
 and rain. Observe the corn:
 a penis in mosaic laid
 with figures of the sun.

* * *

The angels entertain
 the lost occasions.

When I see
 the children here in Berkeley
 marching on the trains
 I think of the Lost Crusade.
 So many children died. It laid
 foundations for a pity none had seen
 in Attila, Mohammed, Charlemagne,
 Bernard. "It is too late,"
 the people shall be saying
 when the children lie on the railway
 and are run down by Santa Fe
 or skewered up the ass with bayonets --
 "It is too late
 for the politicians' pieties. We are at war
 with the old houses; but when
 we win in the mind and mansions
 we shall, in twist of time,
 in change of Newton's apple back around the sun
 to Ptolemy
 make blue our blessed color once again
 and put some Virgin on
 that dais for protection of our children."

The poetry is as a functionary to the mind
 which in pity from the universal
 shall return.

* * *

Young men
 are it is true teaching their young children
 from the Book of Changes.

Sheep eat what other workers wanted.
 "We may believe
 that they eat them innocently
 and without knowing it,
 just as when we
 eat a Sassenage cheese."

But sheep are sheep and after their destroying
 though stupid as people and too inclined
 to the same necessary roaming
 over the sides of canyons,
 onto highways, smack on a sump --
 yet angels worship them. The man
 who catches sheep with a short quirt
 for strangling
 must eat his guts in Hell. Michael
 takes care of him.

For angels worship them. The women
 angels
 come in their cotton trousers
 though necessary virgins
 just seeing sheep. The men
 peel cellulose from their wings
 to make oblations.
 Burning
 the image of the Lamb appears
 as to Van Eyck.

* * *

Angels are you gather
 holy idiots
 who don't need any illustrative
 history.
 Having no precedents they are spared surprises
 and unsurprised learn nothing.
 The special quality of the angels
 is fresh permanence
 and foolishness.

We are far superior to them
 but they have this beauty:
 they don't know it.
 And we can be perfectly at ease therefore with them.

* * *

"That those old men also, to those old men also
 the end of their lives is by no mean equivalent
 to the end of the world. They share with me therefore
 a metaphysic."

-- George Oppen

From out of that dark wood
 these words, guided, return.

Epilogue: A Legend.

It is not people, or dead people,
or things in people.
Dances days

man down walking
come the town and bird woman
body he has known
entering, half the morning
entering.
Uhhh! She gooses him
he clay only to the broomstick

OK. Bird woman since you so damn smart
you anyway
take over. And they together
people say
he walk the same
go to look up the little maidens.
Uhhh! he say. I don' wanna
do it then all the ladies and mammas
hate me and make me take care of any
baby.
He go do it.

Thousand daughters find out
how the dances
in the dances
dances days. Big pleasure. Ooooooh,
man so sore, forever.

Tewa people
celebration sing
songs for Bird Woman
who is osprey. She / they / society
all happy. Girls touching
what you say
pudenda
happy. But they paint him up with Jesus tar
kiss him and send him into chicken coop
poor Indian. All feathery
then send him hero
out of town.

-- John Crawford
1965

(poem from Maximus IV:)

Of old times, there was a very beautiful woman, and she turned all heads of men. She married, and her husband died soon after. She took another, and he died. Within a single year, she had five, and they all died, and they were the cleverest, and handsomest, there were. And she married, again. The sixth, was such a silent man he passed for a fool, but he was wiser than people thought and he figured to find out what was up, with this woman. He watched her, all the time, he kept his eye on her, day and night.

It was summer, and she proposed that they go into the woods, and camp there, to pick berries. When they were in, she had the idea he go ahead and pick the spot and he allowed he would, only he doubled back, and watched her, from there out. As soon as she believed that he was gone she went rapidly on. He followed, unseen, until she came to a pond among rocks in a deep wild place in the woods. She sat down and sang a song, a great foam or froth rose to the surface and in it appeared the back and tail of a great serpent, an immense beast. The woman who had taken off her clothes, embraced the creature, which twined around her, winding inside her arms and legs, until her body was one mass of his.

The husband, watched it all, saw that the serpent

let go his venom into her and that this
was what she was passing on to her husbands, to live
by transferring it to others, and he passed swiftly
to the camping ground and built
a place for the night. He laid two beds,
and built a fire. His wife came. She was in earnest
that they sleep together, he bade her sternly
to lie by herself. She laid down,
and went to sleep. Three times,
during the night, he got up
to replenish the fire. Each time
he called her but she did not
answer. In the morning he shook her,
and she was dead. They sunk her in the pond
where the snake lived.

--Charles Olson

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Sappho, to Phaon

When you see these letters, formed by an anxious hand,
 Will you know them as mine,
 Or will you have to read the salutation
 To know where they come from?
 Will you wonder why the verse has changed,
 Remembering a singer?
 Love makes me weep, elegy its mode;
 No instrument is made for my tears.

I burn like a field, fertile, the harvest like kindling,
 A wild east wind driving the flame.
 The fields that you visit are far, by Mount Aetna;
 A fire great as Aetna possesses me.

Once I could fit words to the tuned string--
 Now nothing comes; song is for minds at ease;
 The strings are my nerves.

The girls of Lesbos give me no joy.
 Anactoria, the beautiful Cydro, are nothing to me,
 Atthis no longer delights my eyes,
 Nor any of those I loved.
 I blame you; what many had, one has.

You are beautiful, you know it, your years those of pleasure,
 Your beauty my danger..
 Take the attributes of a god and you are that god,
 Bacchus, Apollo.
 One loved Daphne, the other the Cretan girl,
 Neither of whom knew the lyre;
 Yet to me the Muses tell their most lovely songs--

If nature denied me grace of body
 She gave me genius instead.
 I am small, but my name fills the world--
 That name is my stature.
 If I am dark, remember,
 Andromeda was pleasing to Perseus;
 White pigeons are mated with those of a different color,
 The black turtle-dove is loved by the bird of green.
 If beauty alone can earn your love
 You will love none, you will love none.

When I read you my poems, then I seemed beautiful;
 You praised every word.
 I sang to you, I remember, as lovers remember,
 Until you would kiss me
 And praise that as well--I pleased you always,
 Most of all when we made love.
 My abandon delighted you as never before,
 The words, the close movement,
 When we could not tell our pleasures apart--
 The sweet languor of our tired bodies.

Now you follow Sicilian girls.
 Why am I here? I wish I were one of them.
 Give back my wanderer, don't listen to him,
 What he tells you he told me before.
 You, Venus, goddess of those mountains,
 Source of my song, protect your singer.

Will my luck continue as it began, always cruel to me?
 I was six when my father died,
 Before his time, and left me to mourn him.
 My young brother fell in love with a whore;
 Poor and embittered he wanders the ocean
 Seeking through evil what he lost through evil.
 And because I warned him, as I had to, he hates me--
 My duty and candor bring me this.
 And as if I were not endlessly tired
 A daughter adds to my cares.

Last of all I complain of you--
 Lacking you I lack everything.
 Look at me, my hair falls on my throat in disorder,
 No jewels weight my fingers,
 My dress is ugly, no gold in my hair,
 No Arabian perfume.
 Miserable, whom should I try to please?
 The author of my beauty is gone.

My heart is vulnerable, can always find reasons
 For being in love--
 Either the Fates made it the law of my birth,
 Giving the thread of my life no resistance,
 Or life follows art, and the Muse I serve
 Makes my nature conform to my gift.
 No wonder I fell in love with a boy
 Whose beard was new, and his power of loving.
 Aurora, I feared you would steal him in place of Cephalus,
 And you would, but your man holds you still.
 If the Moon saw you, who sees everything,
 Phaon, it's you who would sleep forever.
 Venus herself would take you to heaven
 But that she saw you might please even Mars.
 Not yet a man, no longer a boy, fit age
 O ornament and glory of your time,
 Come back, lay down with me here--
 I don't ask you to love, but to let me love you.

I weep as I write this,
 See how the words are obscured.
 If you had to go, you could have gone cleanly--
 You should have told me goodbye.
 You left without my tears, my kiss,
 I had no fear of what I would suffer.
 I have nothing of yours but the wrong you have done me,
 And you no gift to remind you of me.
 I asked you nothing, nor would have,
 But not to forget me.
 By our love, which was never severed,
 And by the Nine I worship, I swear to you,
 When someone said to me, "Phaon is gone,"
 I could not weep, or speak,
 Speechless with grief, words, tears were lost to me,
 I couldn't breathe, my heart was like ice.

I studied grief, I was not ashamed,
 Tearing my hair and my body, keening
 Like a mother who carries her child to the pyre.
 My brother exults in my sorrow, can't leave me alone,
 But to make its cause seem shameful, asks
 "Why does she mourn? Her child is not dead."
 Love and shame are at odds:
 I tore my clothes, they could see my breasts.

You are my care, Phaon, dreams give you back to me,
 Dreams more lucid than the shapes of day.
 There I find you, though you are distant,
 There we embrace, we kiss,
 Our tongues meet, I carress you,
 I speak words so close to the truth
 My mouth harbors my senses--how can I say it?
 Uncontrollable joy as I wake, coming

To the sun returned, bringing a world--
 It is bitter that sleep has left me so quickly.
 I have no recourse, like someone possessed
 I am driven, my hair falling wild,
 To the woods that knew my delight,
 As if they could help me.
 Once they gave us a place to make love,
 But the place is nothing; you made it precious.
 I touch the grass once crushed by our weight,
 Grass that has withered. No sweet bird sings,
 Only the swallow, that sorrowing mother,
 Mourning for Itys.
 She sings of Itys, Sappho of forsaken love--
 Only this. It is silent as midnight.

There is a spring nearby, clear as a mirror
 --Some have had visions there--
 Shaded by trees, the earth green with young grass.
 Once as I lay there, exhausted,
 A goddess appeared;
 She said to me:
 "You that burn with uneven fire,
 You must go to Leucadia
 Where Apollo watches the sea stretched beneath him.
 There Deucalion, insane with love,
 Threw himself down, struck the water uninjured,
 His passion fled, free from the fire.
 This law rules the place: seek it out.
 You must not fear to plunge from the rock."

She left me, as I woke, terrified.
 I will go there, I will find that rock,
 Compelled by a love that overcomes fear--
 Whatever happens is better than this.
 Wind, sustain me, I am not heavy,
 Love, bear me up,
 Or falling, my death shall accuse the wave.
 If I live I vow my art to Apollo.

But why make me go to that shore in my misery

When you could come back to me,
Heal me better than that harsh water,

Be like a god to me, beautiful, precious?
More terrible than cliff or wave,

If I should die, can you bear to have caused it?
Better that you should touch my breasts
Than the rocks bruise them.

Phaon, you praised me once, you said I had genius.

What can I say now? Grief stops my art;
The power of song that I had will not answer.

Daughters of Lesbos, you who are married, you who will marry,

Daughters of Lesbos, whose names are told in my song,
Daughters of Lesbos, whom I loved to my cost--
The lyre is mute.

Phaon has taken all that once pleased you,
Whom once I called mine.

Make him return and your singer returns;
He gave me genius, he took it with him.

What can my words do? The winds disperse them--

If only they brought me your sail.
Come to me--Venus who rose from the sea
Guards lovers who move there,
Love spreads the canvas, will guide you,
The winds give you speed--if only you come to me!

But if you will leave me

--and there is no reason--
Tell me so in a letter

And I will try the Leucadian wave.

The Fifteenth Epistle of Ovid
translated by Michael O'Brien



WEDNESDAY MORNING, TAR BEACH

The moon is full this morning.

The sun is hot.

I stake out my claim
With a confident flick
Of our fading yellow beach towel
And my towel falls full length
Onto the beach,
Settling on the black beach,
Tar Beach,
Onto my roof-top in my city.

I stretch out
On my towel
Without even a pillow
To remind me.

But two pigeons land.

No.

I open a beer.
I'm not going to think of you.

In her bare feet
She walks beside the parapet
Pretending to be alone
And nonchalant.

She examines the brick wall
Next to her
And touches
The tiny loose stones
Of scattered gravel with her toes

When she stops

And preens

Her wing feathers
Waiting

For his slow strut
To catch her there.

The beer spills.

He is able to fluff out his body
For her
And call
To her
And when he calls to her again
She waddles against the tar paper roof.
He mounts again and again.

Three blocks away
Ten floors above the other roofs
In one of twelve hundred windows
Of a two hundred family
Brick building,
A girl in green
Or a woman
Waters house plants
Instead of pulling the blinds
Against the sun.

You cuddle against the tar paper.

No.

You duck your chest away, saying,

"I have to water the plants.

It's Wednesday morning."

"All right.

But don't walk in front of the window

That way."

I'm a real prude.

You put on something green.

Wednesdays

I run across the lawn

Dodging from shadow to shadow

To crouch beside the rhodendrons.

I wait

Until you come to the window

Watering houseplants

Wearing something green.

My breathing hardens.

My breath quickens, becomes erratic.

My skin crawls

With a prickly heat. You bend over

Finished with the watering jar.

My

Perspiration breaks;

Beads roll over my forehead

Catching in my eyebrows

Dripping into my eyes.

My

Hand drops.

Laughing,

You touch yourself as you

Leave the window.

I stretch. I can see over the sill

As you are walking away

As you drop the green harness

And go to the couch

Where I reach into the sunlight.

I reach through the sky to you.

You call.

Your torso twists.

You make an ancient, incoherent

Incantation as I chew your ribs.

We don't hear the noise at the window.

Wednesday afternoons

When you water the garden

You're careful to obliterate
The footsteps by the rhododendrons
To scuff over
The sneaker marks
And pick up
The broad, smooth, dark green leaves
Broken from the rhododendrons.

Every Wednesday morning
You curl
Your fingers into my hair
That is matted
With our perspiration
And
With the wet heels of your hands
Push me aside and get up.
You make some excuse
To go to the window
And expose yourself.

You show my secrets to him
To whoever's lurking
Out there.
You don't even know him.
You inhale.
You preen your eyelashes
With your elbows back
As if he were mixing
In your mysterious perfume.

I've smelled you out.
You don't waddle against the window-box
For any outside panting pervert.
You please yourself.
You strut about your own
Sweating body.
If I've asked you to cover yourself
You pull over green voile and touch
The dark
Point of your breasts
In the sunlight
And laugh at that jerk
In the bushes
As if that's the best he can do.

No.
You laugh
Because I don't know.
From the damp yellow towel we threw
Over the black, acrylic couch cover
I watch you
Caress yourself
At the window.
I'd curse you if I knew.

While I
I just think
You like the sunlight

No.

I think you walk in the light
Only to let me see
The sun shine on you
When you primp
Your secret ways
By the plants
At the window.

No. You laugh at both of us.

I curse you anyway for remembering
Every Wednesday
To leave
To rise from me
To water the houseplants
And for being able to remember.

I'm stupid
And ignorant of why you laugh
But you
You're selfish and deceitful.
You cheat.

And I curse you again

Remembering the day I forgot the time
The day
And where I was
Just being
With you.
And I puzzled then
Until I forgot
Too
That I had forgotten.

A hand
And a wrist
In a sleeve that's white
Ties back a green curtain
The wind had moved
Three blocks away
Then
Pulls the blind.

I lift to you

To the flutter and flap of pigeon wings
As
Two birds
Frightened
Fly off.

--Jack Shoemaker

Hymn for the Minos

Have dwelt by the sea;
have lived beyond winter, murdered my wife;
gathered rude peoples together.

Built ships--
travelled to Egypt
where I saw Amun's tomb.

Made Zagreus grown:
made him Me: sowed fields for the Spring
and set ships across the waters.

Founded cities: Mykenai, Atlantis,
Troy. Built temples, palaces.
Named my city Minos, after me.

Wrought in brass, silver,
gold. Covered Minos with frescoes of dish, blue waters.
Made faces proud, strong, like Gods.

Watched the Dancers prove my Strength-----

died, lost in collapsing walls,
smothered by black air from over the sea.

--Richard Snell

Commentary on Dylan Hymn 1

to make it mean something to you
 whatever, I
 have no holds

the windows out from here, barred, I
 am not you
 no cause to be

what would St. Augustine do
 back here seeing

me and
 you in this strange, reader,
 embrace between

bars, panes, and these
 exactitudes

pains, I wanted you then
 but come, come as you may
 in coming better pains taken

anyway
 love, yes love
 no measure weight and number no
 design

he would say
 you must go it alone no
 mediation none

OK

-- John Crawford



Tuesday February 27th
1968

Thorpe Feidt:

That is, one can't stand around in wonder like in a city like the ape Godzilla or simply go on naming places. They have to be something to one self like flowers can be if one happens to fall in to one as one can and does once in a while. -- "In natural things there is a"

Actually I think there is Earth and Heaven (and Hell of course. But Hell is simply missing out, and won't, though I suppose we all know it or more or less all the time are out of Heaven at least, help at all except to wear one down like leather or the fires of it proper.

It comes then to a good part of Earth herself unless Heaven suddenly renews itself in us which can happen. Or Earth & Heaven are the married pair as they were in mythological society, husband and wife, and the father and the mother of every primary thing -- Night, and Day, and so forth, and so they do differ from Hell even if that is wealth, though the Book I most believe in, a Chinese book, says the real aim is to even be beyond Heaven & Earth as well as Hell in order to be anything which really counts at all. So there's a way for the universe to come home in the Hopi sense!

yrs,
0

--Charles Olson

Gross errata in Mail 1:

- p. 36: In "Here, self-expression has not
become self-promotion . . .", delete "not."
- p. 37: For "where the 20th century and man came
into his own," read ". . . 20th century
ad man . . ."